

BONDING OF MATERIALS WITH INDUCTION HEATING

Cross Reference To Related Applications

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/394,515, filed July 9, 2002.

5 Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to the use of magnetic induction heating of a material to bond multiple materials together.

Background of the Invention

10 [0003] Bonded materials are used in many applications. For example, a slide bearing may be formed from a bonded composition that consists of a metal backing plate and a bearing surface material that is bonded to the plate. The bearing surface material may be a metal composition such as a copper or an aluminum alloy. Slide bearings are linear or rotary in form. Linear slide bearings are in sheet form, whereas rotary slide bearings are in cylindrical or half-cylindrical form. Half-cylindrical slide bearings are used in pairs for applications such as journal bearings in
15 internal combustion engines.

[0004] One method of producing slide bearings involves a continuous process line wherein the feedstock for the metal backing plate is a continuous roll of sheet steel. The continuous roll of sheet steel is fed through heat treating furnaces and further conditioned before the bearing surface material is applied to it. Raised edge lips are formed on the longitudinal edges of the continuous
20 sheet and the bearing surface material, in a liquid form, such as a molten copper or aluminum alloy, is poured onto the sheet. The molten alloy solidifies and is bonded to the sheet, and can be quench treated. Subsequent milling controls the thickness of the bearing surface material. The sheet is cut into desired sizes for slide bearing applications. For rotary slide bearings, the cut pieces are further formed into a cylindrical shape. Economically, the process must operate as an
25 uninterrupted line process, since stopping the line and restarting the line involves a substantial effort in repeatedly bringing the line's furnaces to operating temperature. Therefore there exists the need for a method of bonding metals in a batch process for applications such as slide bearings.

Brief Summary of the Invention

[0005] In one aspect, the present invention is an apparatus for, and method of, producing a bonded product. An electrically conductive sheet is placed between a first induction heating plate, and the combination of a frame and a second induction heating plate disposed within the frame, and inductively heated. The second induction heating plate is moved away from the electrically conductive sheet. A liquid bonding composition, such as a molten metal, is poured into the open interior space of the frame over the top of the electrically conductive sheet wherein it solidifies and bonds to the electrically conductive sheet to produce a bonded product. Optionally the electrically conductive sheet may be placed in an indentation in the first induction heating plate which also serves to contain the liquid bonding composition.

[0006] In another aspect, the present invention is an apparatus for, and method of, continuously producing a bonded product by pressing together a continuous electrically conductive sheet and a continuous bonding material sheet, and advancing the pressed together sheets through an induction coil to heat the electrically conductive sheet and bond the bonding material sheet to the electrically conductive sheet. Alternatively two continuous bonding material sheets are disposed between two electrically conductive sheets, pressed together and advanced through an induction coil to heat the two electrically conductive sheets and bond each of the bonding material sheets to its adjacent electrically conductive sheet.

[0007] These and other aspects of the invention are set forth in this specification and the appended claims.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0008] The figures, in conjunction with the specification and claims, illustrate one or more non-limiting modes of practicing the invention. The invention is not limited to the illustrated layout and content of the figures in the drawings.

[0009] FIG. 1 is an isometric view of one example of an apparatus of the present invention for bonding materials with induction heating.

[0010] FIG. 2 is an isometric view illustrating one example of an arrangement of induction coils for the apparatus shown in FIG. 1.

[0011] FIG. 3 is a front elevational view of the apparatus shown in FIG. 1.

[0012] FIG. 4 is a side elevational view of the apparatus shown in FIG. 1.

[0013] FIG. 5 is a top view of the apparatus shown in FIG. 1, further illustrating the arrangement of induction coils shown in FIG. 2.

[0014] FIG. 6 is a side elevational view of another example of an apparatus of the present invention for bonding materials with induction heating.

[0015] FIG. 7 is a side elevational view of another example of an apparatus of the present invention for bonding materials with induction heating.

[0016] FIG. 8(a), 8(b) and 8(c) illustrate another example of the present invention for bonding materials with induction heating.

10 Detailed Description of the Invention

[0017] Referring now to the drawings, wherein like numerals indicate like elements, there is shown in FIG. 1 through FIG. 5, one example of apparatus 10 of the present invention for bonding of materials with induction heating. Apparatus 10 includes first induction heating plate 12, frame 14 and second induction heating plate 16. First and second induction heating plates 12 and 16, and frame 14, are formed from a heat resistant, non-electrically conductive material, such as a ceramic composition. First plate induction coil 18 is disposed in first induction heating plate 12; frame induction coil 20 is disposed in frame 14; and second plate induction coil 22 is disposed in second induction heating plate 16. When a castable material, such as a ceramic composition, is used for the heating plates and frames, the coils may be embedded in the heating plates and frame during the casting process.

[0018] The induction coils are arranged to form a transverse induction coil assembly for inductively heating an electrically conductive sheet 90 placed between the first induction heating plate, and the combination of the frame and second induction heating plate when the second induction heating plate is inserted into the frame. While the sheet is generally referred to as a metal sheet, any electrically conductive material may be used. The particular arrangement of coils shown in the figures illustrates one non-limiting example of transverse flux coil arrangements that can be used in the present invention. The illustrated induction coils may be fluid (liquid or gas) cooled by circulation of a cooling fluid, such as water, through hollow

induction coils or separate cooling coils in the heating plates and frame. In some examples of the invention, an induction coil may not be necessary in frame 14.

[0019] Metal sheet 90 is placed upon the top surface of first induction heating plate 12. The dimensions of metal sheet 90 are such that when frame 14 is placed over the top surface of first
5 induction heating plate 12, the perimeter of the metal sheet will extend beyond the interior open space in frame 14 to establish a metal sheet contact surface around the metal sheet's perimeter that is sandwiched between the top surface of the first induction heating plate 12 and the bottom surface of frame 14.

[0020] With metal sheet 90 positioned on the surface of first induction heating plate 12, as
10 described above, frame 14 and second induction heating plate 16 are placed over the top surface of the first induction heating plate 12 and the metal sheet. The interior open space in frame 14 is sized to allow the fitting of second induction heating plate 16 so that the bottom surface of the second induction heating plate 16 makes contact with metal sheet 90. With the frame and second
15 induction heating plate placed over metal sheet 90, suitable ac current is supplied from one or more power sources to first plate induction coil 18, frame induction coil 20, and second plate
induction coil 22. The magnetic field created by ac current flow in the first plate induction
coil 18 inductively penetrates and heats into the facing side of metal sheet 90, whereas the
magnetic fields created by ac current flow in the frame induction coil and second plate induction
coil inductively penetrate and heat into the opposing side of the metal sheet. As best illustrated in
20 **FIG. 5**, the orthogonal orientation of the first plate induction coil to the combination of the frame
and second plate induction coils provides a crisscross induction heating pattern that enhances
uniform heat penetration of the sheet. Pressing the metal sheet between the first and second
induction heating plates prevents surface distortion of the sheet as it is heated.

[0021] When metal sheet 90 has been inductively heated to a desired temperature, second
25 induction heating plate 16 is raised at least a sufficient distance to allow pouring of a molten
metal composition, such as a copper or aluminum alloy, onto the top surface of the heated metal
sheet. The temperature of the metal sheet may be sensed by one or more sensors, such as contact
thermocouples embedded in the first and/or second induction heating plates to determine when
the sheet has been heated to the desired temperature. For example, if the metal sheet is steel, it is
30 heated to approximately 2,100°F for casting of a molten alloy, such as bronze, onto its surface.
While the term "molten metal" or "molten alloy" is used, any liquid material capable of bonding
with the heated electrically conductive sheet may be used. Frame 14 remains in place to hold the

metal sheet flat and to provide a dam for the molten metal composition. The molten metal may be ported through one or more openings in frame **14**, or poured, into the interior open space in frame **14** which was previously occupied by the second induction heating plate. After pouring a quantity of molten metal over the top surface of the metal sheet, the metal will bond with the sheet as it cools. Alternatively, the metal can be quenched by injecting a quench fluid or gas into the interior open space in the frame over the top surface of the cooled molten metal. The quench material may be ported through one or more openings in frame **14**, or poured, into the interior open space in frame **14**. The now solidified molten metal is bonded to the metal sheet to form a bonded metal product, and frame **14** can be removed from over the top surface of first induction heating plate **12**. The interior surface wall of frame **14** may be skewed towards its outer wall in the region where the molten metal is poured to facilitate removal of the frame. Additionally the same region of the wall may be specially treated with a coating that will inhibit bonding of the molten metal to the wall of the frame. By way of example, and not limitation, a typical range of thickness of the metal sheet is approximately 3.5 to 19 mm, and a typical range of thickness of the cast metal on the metal sheet is approximately 2.5 to 5.0 mm. Further working of the product can include milling for thickness control of the product. If the product is used as slide bearings, the product is appropriately cut to the desired dimensions. For rotary slide bearings, the cut product is then worked to a cylindrical shaped.

[0022] In an alternative embodiment of the invention, the top surface of first induction heating plate **12**, rather than being flat, is indented for an area approximately equal to the surface area of the bottom surface of second induction heating plate **16**. In this arrangement, after metal sheet **90** has been heated, the second induction heating plate can be moved towards the metal sheet to apply sufficient pressure on the heated sheet to force it into the indentation in the first induction heating plate. In this example, the frame does not generally provide a dam for the molten metal composition that is poured over the top of the sheet since the raised edges of the indented metal sheet and/or the walls of the indentation will serve as a dam for the molten metal composition. In this example of the invention, the frame serves as a means for holding the metal sheet in place during induction heating and molten metal pour after the sheet is pressed into the indentation in the first induction heating plate.

[0023] In other examples of the invention longitudinal flux coils, such as solenoidal coils, may be utilized. For example, as illustrated in **FIG. 8(a)**, solenoidal induction coil **21** is disposed in inductor assembly **23**. Metal sheet **90** is inserted into indentation **25** in first heat resistant

plate **13**. Second heat resistant plate **17** is placed over the first ceramic plate and the enclosed metal sheet is inserted into inductor assembly **23** as shown in **FIG. 8(b)** wherein it is inductively heated by a magnetic field established when a current flows through coil **21**. After the metal sheet reaches the desired temperature, the enclosed metal sheet is removed from the inductor assembly, and the second heat resistant plate is removed, as shown in **FIG. 8(c)**, so that the molten metal can be poured over the metal sheet in the indentation.

[0024] In another example of apparatus **11** of the present invention for bonding of materials with induction heating, as illustrated in **FIG. 6**, a continuous supply of base metal sheet **92** is provided from base metal sheet supply roll **30** and a continuous supply of bond material sheet **94** is provided from bond material sheet supply roll **32**. Steel is a suitable, but non-limiting, composition of the base metal sheet, and bronze is a suitable, but non-limiting, composition of the bond material sheet. Suitable joining and conveying means, such as rollers **36** press metal sheet **92** and bond material sheet **94** together and advance it through one or more induction coils **38** wherein the magnetic field established by an ac current flow through the coils inductively heats and bonds the bond material sheet to the base metal sheet. The one or more induction coils may be of any suitable configuration, including transverse flux or longitudinal flux coils, or a combination thereof. Since the induced current flows in the bond material sheet and returns through the base metal sheet, the required frequency of the ac current in the one or more induction coils is lower than that required for the previous examples of the invention. Optionally the bonded sheets may be quenched with a suitable quench medium supplied through quench apparatus **40** after the bonded sheets exit from the one or more induction coils. The bonded sheets can be accumulated, for example, on bonded sheets product roll **42** for bulk shipment to finishing facilities that produce, for example, slide bearings from the product roll.

[0025] **FIG. 7** illustrates an alternative to the arrangement in **FIG. 6**. In the example of the invention shown in **FIG. 7**, two bond material sheets **94a** and **94b** are provided from bond material sheet supply rolls **32a** and **32b**, respectively, and are disposed between two base metal sheets **92a** and **92b**, which are provided from base metal sheet supply rolls **30a** and **30b**. Suitable joining and conveying means, such as rollers **36** press metal sheets **92a** and **92b** together with the two bond material sheets **94a** and **94b** between them, and advance the pressed sheets through one or more induction coils **38** wherein the magnetic field established by an ac current flow through the coils inductively heats and bonds each of the two bond material sheets to the base metal sheet making contact with it. Generally the melt temperature of the bond material sheet is lower than

the melt temperature of the base metal sheet. In some arrangements the required heated temperature of the base metal sheet may be sufficient to overheat the bond material sheet. The arrangement shown in **FIG. 7** minimizes heating of the bond material sheets since induced currents flow only through the two opposing base metal sheets. Consequently the required frequency of the ac current in the one or more induction coils is lower than that required for the previous example of the invention in **FIG. 6**. After optional quenching, bonded sheets comprising base metal sheet **92a** and bond material sheet **94a** is accumulated on bonded sheets product roll **42a** and bonded sheets comprising base metal sheet **92b** and bond material sheet **94b** is accumulated on bonded sheets product roll **42b**. Optionally a sheet of heat resistant material can be inserted between adjacent facing sides of bond material sheets **94a** and **94b** prior to induction heating to keep the two bond metal sheets from sticking together. The sheet of heat resistant material is removed subsequent to the step of induction heating.

[0026] The foregoing examples do not limit the scope of the disclosed invention. The scope of the disclosed invention is further set forth in the appended claims.